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J. J. LANKES: PAINTER-GRAVER ON WOOD

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J. J. LANKES:

PAINTER-GRAVER ON WOOD

BY BOLTON BROWN



ALFRED FOWLER
KANSAS CITY
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LANKEE

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JAN 30 1939 L27
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J. J. LANKES: PAINTER-GRAVER ON WOOD

I first came upon these engravings quite by accident, and was immediately enamoured of them. Perhaps it were more accurate to say, enamoured of the view of wood-engraving their maker holds, though I doubt whether he has ever troubled himself to formulate a conscious point of view. Yet the point of view is there: if it were not, the engravings would not be there.

A refreshing thing about these prints is their freedom from the atmosphere of the studios, with its endless suggestions of other men's art. He seems to see without the familiar results of steepage in art atmospheres, and his message is, therefore, not an echo but an original thing born of the contact between the external world and his own fresh mind.

A wood-engraving of a linear drawing is done in one of two ways: the block, which before it is engraved at all prints black, may be so cut that the resulting design is a pattern of dark on a ground of light. This is negative engraving, because the incision of the tool simply removes parts of the dark pattern, thus adding the area removed to the negative ground against which the pattern is seen. All wood-engravings which reproduce ordinary dark-on-light drawings are



necessarily done in this way. The engraver cuts *around* the artist's drawing: he does not cut the drawing itself.

The second way to engrave is just the reverse of this: the cutting *is* the drawing; the chisel delineates as it travels. The result is a drawing in white-on-black, a pattern, the lights of which are positive and the darks negative. This is, of course, the artist's method, in which the result is conceived from the beginning in terms of white chisel cuts that draw. This is Mr Lankes' method pure and simple.

If a man can imagine anything beautiful in white incisions on a black ground, here is his rational way to embody his thought. And, incidentally, to get a block that will print. Very obviously, Mr Lankes is such a man - his entire output makes up a demonstration of keenness and sensitiveness to just this use of engraving.

This young artist is gifted, however, with more than the mere lace-maker's pleasure in the perception of light on dark: he possesses in addition a draughtsman's interest in many sides of the objective world and an original power of translating that interest into terms of a drawing necessarily very different from what is done with brush or pencil - a drawing that is conceived in memories of chisel cuts and created in those terms.



J. J. LANKES: PAINTER-GRAVER ON WOOD

I do not, off-hand, recall any engraving which is more sensitive at once to nature and to the substance in which the artist expresses his ideas of nature. Those compromises with truth, and, be it added, with beauty, which every art, according to its tools, necessitates, are here quite unconsciously and perfectly made. The resultant print looks like simplicity itself, and so it is, but not at all the simplicity of emptiness. It is the simplicity of a success that is so natural that we think it is easy and obvious - until we try to duplicate it.

No, unobtrusive as is Mr Lankes' beautiful engraving, it is not the sort of thing that is often done, or can be often done. Only very rarely has anyone the genuine Bewickian gift; the joy in the technique of white-line wood engraving combined with the intelligence to adapt nature thereto.

That unit of the artist-engraver's work, the cut of the chisel, is hardly ever obscured in Mr Lankes' prints. There is practically no cross-hatching, and even the faint traces of it we regret. The lights are large, frank, straightforward slices into the box-wood: not that wild hacking which the professional temperamentalist sometimes gives us, the hacking of a plank with a hatchet; but the steady-handed control of one who is not even remotely touched with the disease of imagining that absence of technical skill is evidence


TANKES

of artistic sensibility.

Not only is Mr Lankes' work notable for the graphic quality of his cutting; the engraving of an artist as contrasted with the artistry of an engraver; but he gets tones as well. In St. Mary's Inn, all along with his excellent placing of his white cuts, he keeps an eagle eye on his values and the print as a whole reads perfectly as a design in values. The Tavern, a favorite of mine, well achieves the same result; the whole subordinated to the topmost gleam in the cumulus cloud above the roof.

In Three Ships, the creation of the most distant vessel, a mile away, differing entirely from the method in the nearer ones, pleases me vastly. It is a mere blur, got by a half-dozen cuts where the light comes through the silhouette between the sails; yet the ship is there, sailing, in an atmosphere, and on a brisk, blue, white-capped sea. The Toad is a little classic. This toad needs no gem in its head: he is a gem all over. A toad in the grass, and three toadstools; are they not well? This is the print that makes every one that sees it want to engrave on wood.

But to go on speaking of these works of art, serially, one after another: The Man with a Hoe, The Mower, The Sleigh Ride; profits but little. They must be seen and studied and possessed. I abominate try-



ing to put into words what by its very nature can only be put into brush strokes or chisel cuts. It is just because Mr Lankes needed the graver to express himself that he tells his story, not with words, but with this special tool. And I, for one, find it a charming story, well told in the only way it could be told and well worth the telling.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

(The order in which they appear)

PORTICO
THREE SHIPS
THE KNOLL
TOAD
THE SLEIGH RIDE
CHURCH IN WINTER



A LIST OF BOOKS

J. J. Lankes: Painter-Graver on Wood, by Bolton Brown. A critical essay with six wood-engravings by Mr Lankes. Bds. Price $1.50 per copy.

Bookplates by Sidney L. Smith, by Gardner Teall. A critical essay with a check-list and *two original copper-plate impressions* of bookplates by the artist. Price $1.00 per copy.

A Directory of Bookplate Artists, with notes concerning their work, compiled from data furnished by the artists, by Alfred Fowler. Price $1.00 per copy.

Bookplates by Henry J. Stock, R. I., by James Guthrie. A critical essay with check-list and nine illustrations, including the artist's portrait and a frontispiece in colors. Price $1.00 per copy.

A Catalogue of Bookplates by Stanley Harrod. Seven illustrations, including an original etching. Price $0.50 per copy.

In Preparation

The Bookplates of Frank Brangwyn, R. A..
By Haldane Macfall.

Sturge Moore's Bookplates,
By Alexander J. Finberg.

The Bookplates by Robert Anning Bell, A. R. A.,
By Walter Shaw Sparrow..

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